

## DECISION MAKING

*How we propose to develop programs  
and to decide among competing possibilities*

The management regime Congress established for the preserve was clearly intended as an experiment, and part of the experimental purpose is to attempt to reduce the conflicts associated with federal lands. A number of other such experiments exist. Some have met with success; others have not. But no other approach to federal land management has involved an entity endowed with as much independence and flexibility as Congress provided the trust in the Valles Caldera Preservation Act.

The trust starts with a “blank slate.” Seldom is a new federal property so unburdened by a previous history of public use. Seldom do land managers enjoy as much freedom to design a stewardship program specifically tailored to the character of a place.

The trust must remain a small organization if it is to have a realistic chance of becoming financially self-sustaining. Although large agencies such as the Forest Service and the

National Park Service require multiple administrative tiers to ensure uniform implementation of national policies, the trust can function in a relatively unencumbered manner. Not only are its policies and decisions developed in the absence of a cumbersome bureaucracy, but the channels by which directives reach its field managers are short and direct.

Similarly, the Valles Caldera Preservation Act permits the trust to develop its own administrative and decision-making processes. This allows the trust to learn from the experience of other agencies and encourages innovation. Among the advantages conferred by this flexibility is the opportunity to develop a science-based and adaptive approach to management.

Finally, the structure of the board of trustees guarantees that major policies and decisions will be vetted from diverse perspectives that are broadly representative of the stakeholders of the preserve.



Board and staff  
planning retreat,  
June 2002.

Photograph courtesy William deBuys

Congress clearly intended that board members exchange ideas and viewpoints as they consider management options and direction. The diversity of backgrounds represented by the board has the potential to result in unusually broad consensus among divergent interests.

#### **THE VCT'S APPROACH TO PLANNING**

As discussed in chapter 5, the trust intends to keep the planning process for the preserve simple and accessible to anyone with an interest in the VCNP. Preserve planning begins with this document, the framework, which describes the ecological, social, legislative, and

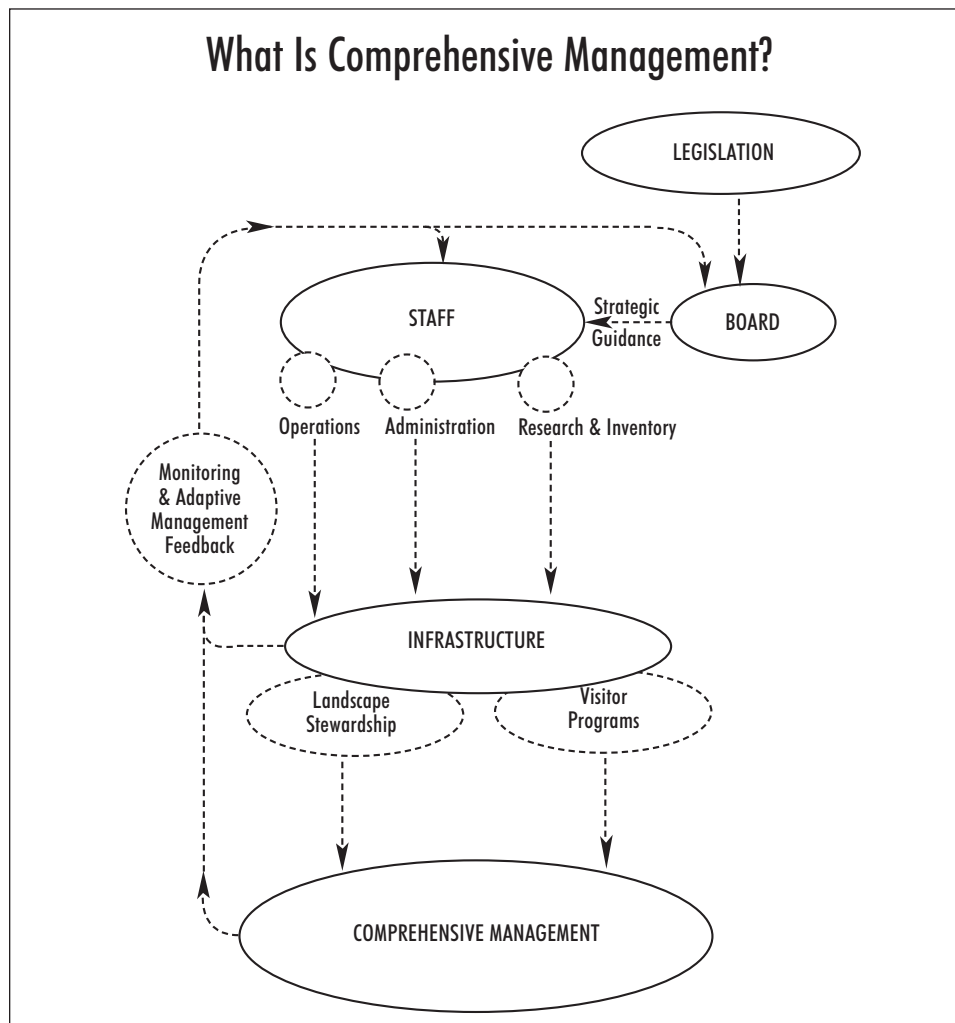
regulatory conditions in which planning must occur and identifies the principal issues that the trust must address as it develops programs.

In recent decades, planning for many federal agencies has become increasingly cumbersome. With some notable exceptions, the development of 10-year plans for individual National Forests has proved especially expensive and time consuming, while failing to produce a high level of satisfaction within the agency or among its constituencies. Because of this, the Valles Caldera Preservation Act expressly exempts the trust from the obligation to produce a plan following the model required for National Forests (see VCPA 108[f]1).

Instead, the trust is free to develop programs according to planning horizons that the trust alone determines. It is also free to explore new planning approaches that are thrifty, flexible, and directly responsive to public involvement. In pursuing these goals, the trust understands that it will need to balance the development of individual plans for discrete program areas with the long-term obligation to track and respond to cumulative impacts. The diagrams in this chapter

illustrate our vision for a planning and decision-making process that incorporates three key features: public involvement in the decision-making process; adaptive management and continuous feedback of new information; and a systematic, transparent process that fully integrates the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.

The chart below shows that the starting point for the development of a comprehensive management program for the preserve is the



Valles Caldera Preservation Act, which brought the preserve into being and created the structure of the trust. The next step is for the board of the trust to develop a management strategy for the preserve that reflects the legislative instructions of the VCPA and that honors all other applicable laws. This framework, in draft form, is an initial expression of such a strategy. After thorough public discussion and involvement, the board will formally adopt a final version of this document, thereby providing “strategic guidance” to the staff, which then will develop and implement programs, projects, and activities to carry out the board’s strategic intent. As program development goes forward, both board and staff will draw upon the participation of the public, together with learning derived from scientific monitoring, to inform ongoing planning and decision making on the preserve. This is the essence of science-based adaptive management.

Observers of the trust will note that many programs are already being developed and implemented at the preserve without a formal strategic framework in place. This is one reason the trust explicitly recognizes its present programs to be “interim.” Another reason for calling them “interim” is that most of these programs are designed to generate learning that will assist in

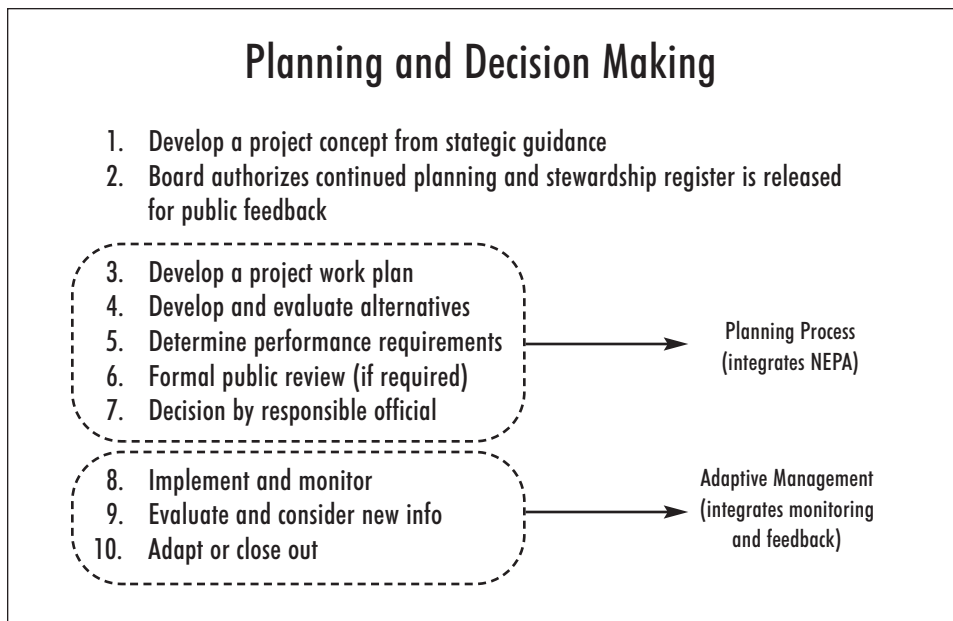
the development of successor programs of a more lasting character. They are intentionally experimental.

Because the preserve was run as the privately owned Baca Ranch for more than a century, most of the current physical infrastructure that was passed along to the trust was designed to support the cattle ranching, timbering, and hunting enterprises that constituted the main activities of the private ranch. Today the trust board and staff are working to create infrastructure for new activities that accommodate the public, such as hiking and other recreational uses. At the same time, much work is under way to develop a better understanding of the natural, cultural, and archaeological resources on the preserve. The pursuit of deeper understanding will also extend to soliciting feedback from visitors to the preserve who participate in its programs.

#### **STEWARDSHIP ACTION RECORD SYSTEM (StARS)**

The chart on page 67 illustrates the short- to midterm planning process that we have called the Stewardship Action Record System (StARS).

Under this process, the staff presents the general concept for a proposed stewardship action to the board of trustees. If the board authorizes further planning and development, the proposal will be made available to the public for review, the primary



objective of which will be to inform the trust of any adjustments needed in the proposed objectives and to set the stage for developing alternatives for implementing the proposal.

In the next stage of proposal development, the trust will analyze the alternatives to determine a desired implementation strategy. In cases where the proposed action is not categorically excluded from preparation of an environmental document under the trust's NEPA procedures, the trust will disclose the results of the analysis in either an environmental assessment (EA) or an environmental impact statement (EIS). Except in cases of emergency, the public will have an opportunity at this stage to review the work of the trust. After reviewing the comments and suggestions the

public provides, the trust will then make a decision whether to implement the proposed action, to implement it in modified form, or not to implement it.

For projects that have a potential impact on cultural or natural resources on the preserve, a monitoring protocol will be initiated to measure the outcomes and impacts of the action and particularly to determine if predictions about those outcomes prove accurate. This information will feed the adaptive management cycle by informing periodic review of the project. The lessons learned will allow managers to modify or adapt the program in order to better achieve its goals (see chart on page 69).

In the coming years, the preserve will host a diverse array of programs and activities. On any

given day, we may find hikers enjoying the backcountry, cattle grazing the lush valles, scientists surveying archaeological features, school groups learning about the caldera's geology, or a production company shooting photographs for a fashion spread. The impacts of these diverse uses will be monitored under an integrated program that gives managers of the preserve a sound understanding of the overall impacts, or cumulative effects, of these activities. This grounding in science will enable the preserve to accommodate a wide variety of uses while reliably ensuring protection of its natural and cultural resources.

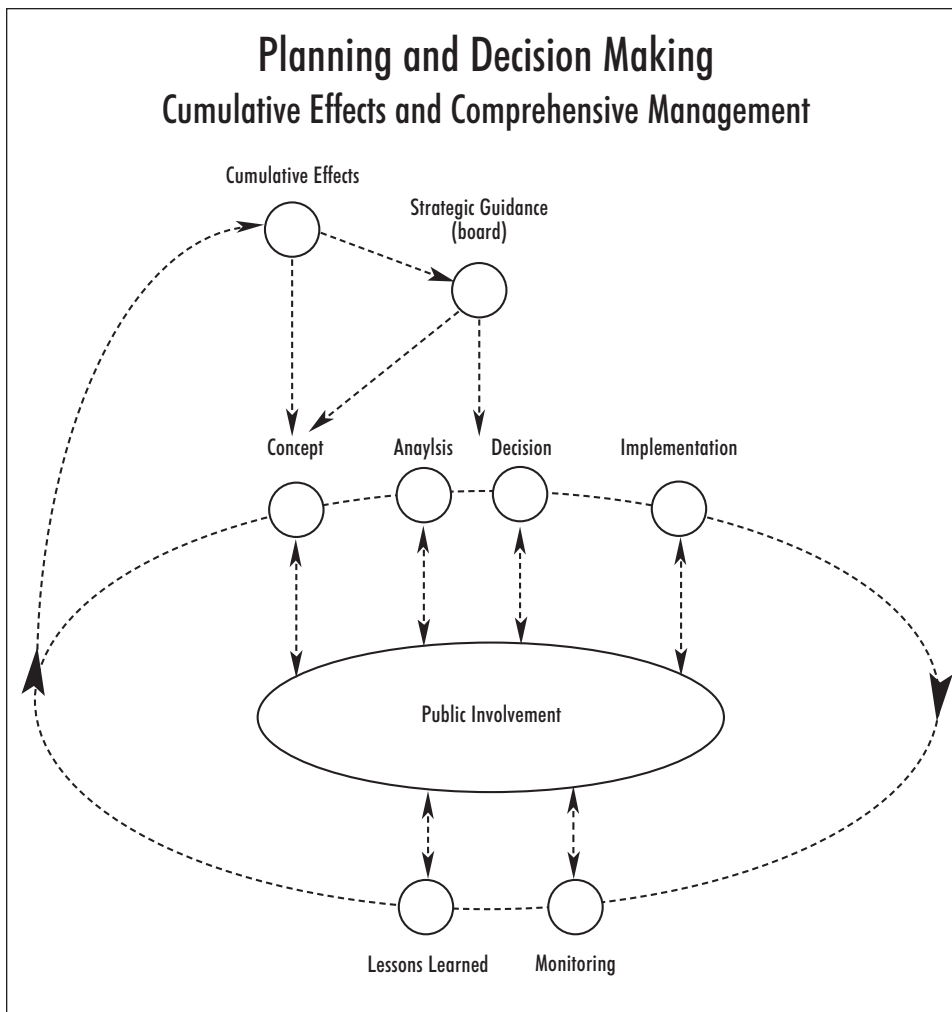
#### **RESTRICTING ACTIVITIES IN TIME AND SPACE**

As planning proceeds, the board may elect to reserve certain areas of the preserve for the pursuit of certain goals (e.g., ecological restoration or protection) or for accommodation of specific activities or uses. These reservations may be temporary, seasonal, or long term; they may encompass a few acres or thousands of acres; they may take the form of strict reservations for a limited set of uses, excluding all others; or they may be expressed as a "management emphasis" that establishes the primacy of one or more activities or goals without barring the possible temporary accommodation of other, even

conflicting, activities and goals if such accommodation is deemed in the best interest of the preserve.

The range of goals, activities, and uses for which such reservations might be considered is extremely broad. It might include designating certain areas for ecological protection or restoration, specific recreation activities (including backcountry hiking and camping), religious and cultural uses (discussed in chapter 5), livestock production, or timber management. This is by no means an exhaustive list. Different kinds and combinations of uses will undoubtedly develop as time goes on.

As it considers the possibility of these kinds of designations, the board will bear in mind two important matters: first, that any designation will need to undergo appropriate NEPA analysis and review, including involvement by the interested public in formulating and evaluating the proposed action, and second, that management of the VCNP should be conceived and understood at the scale of the broader landscape in which it occurs. The preserve consists of only 89,000 acres within a complex of well over a million contiguous acres of public lands. The western part of Santa Fe National Forest, which is centered on the Jemez Mountains, consists of 1,000,000 acres, and Bandelier National



Monument encompasses 33,000 acres. Additional lands in the care of the BLM, mainly at lower elevations, complete the federal total. With the exception of Bandelier, the San Pedro Parks Wilderness, and a few other, small areas, nearly all this vast expanse is open to the full range of potential public uses. Given the abundance of opportunities within the regional landscape, it seems clear that the VCNP need not strive to be all things to all people. It need

not accommodate all conceivable uses; rather, its management should emphasize those activities that are most compatible with the singular character of the preserve and with the goals and values of its stewardship.

#### **ADMINISTRATIVE INFRASTRUCTURE**

The trust has consciously developed its internal administrative structure in order to support its planning, decision-making, and management





Valle San Antonio.

responsibilities as effectively as possible.

The structure of the trust has three important and distinct layers. The act established the board of trustees as the governing body of the trust. As with most corporate boards, its role is to oversee the activities of the trust and to develop and provide the vision, strategic direction, and conceptual framework under which the trust will fulfill its obligations. Building on the management principles adopted in 2001, this document, the framework, is the next major expression of the board toward that end. It represents the collective thinking of the board of trustees, resulting from

over two years of interaction among themselves and with the public in an effort to synthesize a comprehensive vision for the preserve.

After representatives of President Clinton seated the initial board in January 2001, the board plunged into the detail work of developing its early programs and hiring a staff. As the building of the executive team and professional staff neared completion in 2003 and with the adoption of administrative policies and procedures, the board is now focusing its attention on long-term strategic vision, upper-level program priorities and decisions, and oversight of fiduciary responsibilities, all of



**THE VALLES CALDERA PRESERVATION ACT SPECIFIES  
THE TRUST'S RESPONSIBILITIES AS FOLLOWS:**

1. To provide management and administrative services for the preserve;
2. To establish and implement management policies to achieve the purposes and requirements of this title;
3. To receive and collect funds and make dispositions for the management and administration of the preserve; and
4. To cooperate with federal, state, and local governmental units and with Indian tribes and pueblos to further the purposes of the preserve.

which will become increasingly complex over time.

Operational management of the trust and the preserve will be the responsibility of an executive team, made up of the executive director, the preserve manager, the business manager, and the preserve scientist. Although each member of the team will have specific responsibilities related to the management of the trust and the preserve, the executive director bears the responsibility to ensure that overall management is cohesive and coordinated, that it carries out the direction provided by the board, and that all relevant operational, legal, financial, and scientific issues are fully considered. In addition, the executive team will serve as primary advisers to the board.

A cadre of professional and administrative support staff has

been assembled to manage programs and projects undertaken by the trust. This support staff consists of individuals drawn from a range of disciplines and possessing expertise in backcountry recreation, cultural resources, range, forestry, fisheries, and wildlife as well as administrative functions such as data management, geographic information systems (GIS), communications, and natural resources planning. As programs are developed and implemented on the preserve, seasonal staff, volunteers, and numerous cooperators and contractors will augment the personnel resources of the trust.

Given its reliance on cooperators and volunteers, it will be incumbent on the trust to develop strong, long-term relationships with partner agencies, tribes, civic organizations, surrounding communities, and the scientific community.

